

2024 EU Elections: Preparing for the future generations or going backwards?

**Eurochild's analysis of the manifestos of political
groups represented in the European Parliament**



Eurochild
Putting children at
the heart of Europe

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Since June 1979, European citizens have been called to the ballot box to elect their representatives to serve in the European Parliament. It is a time of great importance, as the European Parliament has an active role in the legislation-making of the European Union. By electing the next 720 members of parliament, European citizens determine the political priorities for the next legislature, 2024-2029.

With the upcoming election, political groups are seizing the opportunity to display their political agenda for the next legislature to attract national policymakers. These agendas are demonstrated in the Manifestos, which are the main indicators of their political priorities.

1. Fight against child poverty must be a priority

In 2022, in the EU, the share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion was 24.7 %, amounting to approximately 20 million children.¹

While factors vary across the European Union, the poverty risk for children raised by a single parent, in families with three or more children, living in rural and the most remote areas of the EU, or with a migrant or Roma background is up to **three times higher** than that of other children.² The **pandemic and subsequent lockdowns**, followed by and coupled with the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, have **exposed and exacerbated inequalities**, plunging many children and families, particularly those from vulnerable backgrounds, **deeper into poverty** and further into social exclusion.³

It is recognised that children at risk of social exclusion due to poverty or other forms of disadvantages are likely to **face barriers in accessing essential services**, such as health and education. However, it is also known that one of the main determinants of social exclusion of children is unequal access to key services, essential for their well-being and the development of their social, cognitive and emotional skills. Indeed, there is a **correlation** between poor health, early school leaving and lack of qualification, which can lead to unemployment. Therefore, children growing up in poverty and social exclusion **start their lives at a disadvantage**, which **can** have long-term implications for their development and future prospects.⁴

As a result, social exclusion can be **transmitted through generations**, jeopardising social cohesion over generations and generating higher costs to our welfare states, hindering

¹ [Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion](#), Eurostat 2023

² [Commission proposal for a Joint Employment Report](#), JCR 2021

³ [Poverty takes away the right to childhood](#), Eurochild 2023

⁴ [COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION \(EU\) 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee](#), Official Journal of the European Union

economic and social resilience. It is estimated that not reducing child poverty and its effects **cost an average of 3.4% of GDP in European countries each year.**⁵

Therefore, **fighting child poverty** must be a priority for future European leaders. However, the main priorities of political groups' manifestos are built around **prosperity, re-industrialisation, competitiveness** and **defence**. Security including migration plays a significant role. To unpack this further we have analysed what political groups' manifestos say about children.

2. Children: a political priority for the next legislature?

Children's rights cannot be ignored. While there is a certain consensus on their importance across the political spectrum, approaches diverge.

The **European People's Party (EPP)**, the largest political group in the European Parliament, will work around their motto: united in diversity. With regards to children, EPP will focus on **fighting child sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, cyberbullying and cyber threats** that may lead to kidnapping and other forms of violence, **online and offline**. EPP also warrants to fight child poverty and rare child diseases. EPP's approach will revolve around family ties and solidarity between generations, which can benefit children.

The **Party of the European Socialists (PES)** presents a strong social agenda, striving for better social justice for all. Regarding children, PES candidates pledge to **eradicate child poverty** in Europe, **strengthen child protection** and overall ensure the full **implementation of the European Child Guarantee**. PES promises to act in the best interest of the child when managing asylum and migration.

The group suggests other solutions that, whilst not directly targeted to children, will positively influence children's well-being and development such as reducing unemployment, poverty and social exclusion as a whole, and ensuring that public services are back at the heart of society. It implies reforms in accessing housing, healthcare, education and transportation, while acknowledging the climate crisis and related injustices.

The **Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)** wishes to strengthen the principle of subsidiarity and prepare a digital, green and sustainable transition. In relation to children, ALDE aims to ensure every European child learns at least one foreign language. **Likewise, they wish for transformative education strategies** that foster **opportunities for all children to prepare them for the digital and green transitions** ahead. **They will carry out reforms to** effectively prevent and prosecute criminal offences including **child abuse**, without thereby infringing the citizen's right to privacy. Children are also approached through their families, notably when ensuring a **uniformed recognition of parenthood** and sufficient access to parental leave. Finally, providing municipalities with more direct access

⁵ Estimated total monetary value of loss of employment, income and health for people aged 25-59 due to socio-economic disadvantage during childhood in 2019. [The economic costs of childhood socio-economic disadvantage in European OECD countries](#), OECD 2022

to EU programmes, such as the ESF+, could allow tailored measures for children at the local level.

The European Left will work toward a social transformation promoting an integral ecology.

Children do not hold a substantial place in The Left programme, as they will not be the direct recipients of proposed measures. Indeed, children are **approached through the lens of family**: ensuring that parenthood is uniformly recognised and accessing antenatal and maternal health services are the key measures.

However, The European Left foresees fighting poverty by promoting an anti-poverty strategy, safeguarding a right to housing, an inclusive education, a universal and free access to health care, and creating quality care structures for children. Those measures, although not tailored for children, have the potential to shield and enhance children's rights.

The Greens intend to build a **greener society** that will address the injustice and inequality that are polarising societies. With respect to children, we commend this pledge **to halve child poverty by 2030** and **eliminate child poverty by 2040**. To build a Europe of Social rights, they will demand **adequate funding for the European Child Guarantee**, to make sure that all children have universal and equal access to care, (early) childhood education, healthy nutrition, adequate housing and healthcare, as well as recognise their right to participate in play, recreation, sport and culture.

Overall, The Greens are determined to protect the **climate and the environment**. It supposes enshrining the right to a healthy and clean environment, because children are the most vulnerable to pollution. Similarly, they want to ensure that healthcare systems include mental health and drug addiction support.

The European Free Alliance (EFA) stands for self-determination, as its foundational principle.

Concerning children, EFA does not seem to have any measures addressed to children directly.

EFA is concerned with protecting **local interests and identities**. It involves supporting the human rights of all Europeans and effectively protecting minority rights, as well as foster greater participation from the bottom up. These proposals will serve some children.

The European Christian Political Movement (ECPM) values healthy families and human dignity.

Looking at measures on children, ECPM emphasises the principle of the best interest of the child as the primary consideration in all actions concerning children. It is attached to preserving children's rights to have a family. However, *'ECPM promotes the sovereignty of the family, based on marriage between one man and one woman...'*. Children must have access to essential services (e.g. education, health, recreational community centres) and to be safe online. ECPM is committed to protecting and promoting the rights and needs of individuals living with disabilities, which includes children. The fight against sexual exploitation, from which children and mostly girls are the victims, will be a priority for future ECPM representatives.

Consequently, Political Groups have identified children's rights in their agenda. Eurochild would be happy to collaborate further.

3. Work with Eurochild to mainstream children's rights

Eurochild **welcomes** the political groups' willingness to address children's rights. We are delighted that several recommendations put forth by Eurochild during the consultations leading to the formulation of the manifestos have been embraced.

Eurochild strives to **eradicate child poverty**. Therefore, it advocates **for systemic reforms** that address structural inequalities and calls for prioritising public investment in **education, healthcare, housing, family support, and early childhood**.

In Eurochild's view, **strong social agendas** aiming at bridging the gap of social inequalities, by ensuring universal and equal access to essential services (e.g. health, housing, education, childcare etc) are essential to safeguard the rights of all children. Among others, measures pursuing the full implementation of the European Child Guarantee are strongly supported. Eurochild also believe that multilevel governance and coordination is vital in delivering this instrument therefore **localities must be involved and accounted for** in legislation making and fund allocations. Indeed, grassroots organisations detain the expertise and face immediate needs to sustain children's well-being and development.

Amid the rise of populist and far-right movements, there's a concerning trend of campaigning against the rights of marginalised groups including women, children, LGBTQI+ individuals, religious minorities, ethnic and racial minorities, migrants, and refugees. Consequently, civil society organisations and activists defending these rights often face backlash. Given the widespread influence of far-right movements across the EU, it's imperative **to counter anti-child rights movements** with targeted measures. Establishing a **European Mechanism** dedicated to monitoring and addressing this trend could prove instrumental in safeguarding child rights in Europe.

Eurochild aligns with provisions to **prevent** and **fight criminality against children**, offline and online. Eurochild and its members are particularly engaged in the struggle against child sexual abuse online and cyberbullying.

Eurochild commends political groups in affirming the **centrality of family and caregiver** in children's development. In family care must be given priority and parenthood must be uniformly recognised across Europe. Parents must also be the recipient of assistance adapted to their needs, to allow them to strive and support their children.

However, **children cannot be addressed only through their families**. Such an approach can sustain the idea of parents' ownership over their children, subsequently discarding children as agents in their own right. Furthermore, the **term family must be defined broadly** to encompass diverse family structures, including single-parent households, LGBTQ+ families, extended families, as a restrictive interpretation would exclude certain families and/or their children.

Every child must be considered, including children from minorities, children in migration, and children in conflict with the law, for who there is little mention in political agendas.

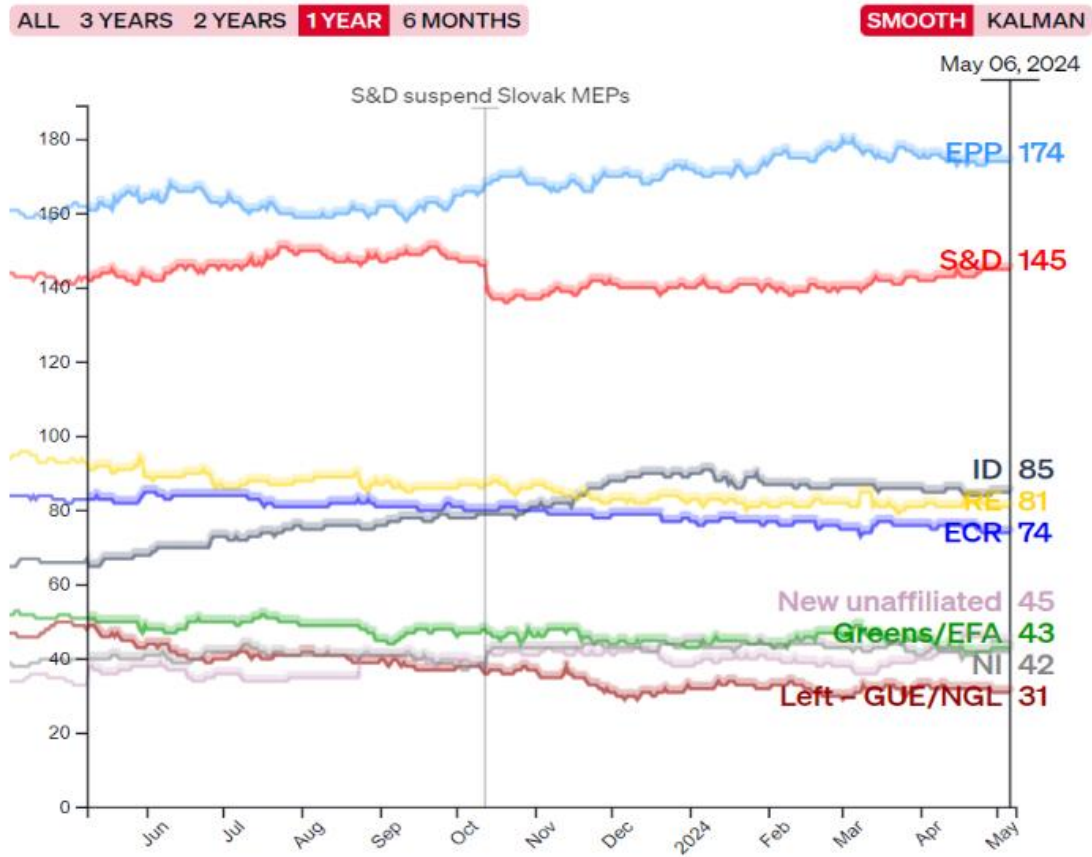
Similarly, approaching families from an **economic standpoint**, solely with the aim of reintegrating parents into the workforce, disregards children's rights. Measures stemming from this approach may not adequately address the needs and rights of children, as they would not be the primary focus. **Adequate funding through child benefit must be allocated to children directly.**

Eurochild encourages **better child participation at both EU and national levels**, which is not mentioned in political groups' priorities. Indeed, children should be consulted about decisions that concern them.

4. Annexes

European Political Parties	European Parliament Political Groups	Manifestos
PES	S&D	<u>The Europe we want</u>
European Left	GUE/NGL	<u>European election manifesto 2024</u>
European Green Party	The Greens/EFA	<u>European Green Party manifesto</u>
EPP	EPP	<u>EPP 2024 manifesto</u>
EFA	The Greens/EFA	<u>A Europe for all</u>
ALDE	Renew	<u>Your Europe, your freedom: delivering change for you</u>
ECPM	ECR	<u>Political Manifesto EU 2024</u>

National trends on Politico Europe *Poll of Polls* showing the seat projections for the next European Parliament, as of the 6th of May.⁶



⁶ [Polls of Polls, Politico](#)

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